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FM AMEMBASSY RIYADH
TO RUEHZM/GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6724
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
INFO RUEHJI/AMCONSUL JEDDAH PRIORITY 9118

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RIYADH 002080

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/09/2027

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SUBJECT: MORE SUPPORT FOR GRAND MUFTI'S FATWA DISCOURAGING
SAUDI YOUTH FROM JOINING FOREIGN FIGHTERS IN IRAQ

REF: 2007 RIYADH 2049

Classified By: Acting Deputy Chief of Mission David Rundell for reasons
1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (U) SUMMARY: Commentary from the Saudi press on the October 1 sermon of Sheikh Abdul Aziz Bin Muhammed Al-Asheikh, the most senior Wahhabi cleric and the Grand Mufti of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, continues to be strongly positive. Saudi Islamic scholars and officials are voicing full support for the sermon, which is now referred to as an official fatwa. In addition to Saudi Islamic scholars, Dr. Saleh bin-Humaid, imam of the Grand Mosque in Mecca and Chairman of the Majlis Al Shoura, reiterated the Mufti's statement during the Juma prayer on October 5. Also in an effort to end freelance fatwas, the Presidency for Scientific Research and Religious Edicts, the Riyadh-based organization comprising prominent Islamic scholars that issues fatwas, has set up a website for its religious rulings. END SUMMARY.

12. (U) The English language daily "Arab News" reported on October 3 that Saudi Islamic scholars and officials are voicing full support for the October 1 sermon of Sheikh Abdul Aziz Bin Muhammed Al-Asheikh, the most influential Saudi Wahhabist cleric (reftel). According to press reports, Al-Asheikh criticized Saudis for joining the war in Iraq. In an official translation of his statement, Al-Asheikh admitted he felt "obligated to advise imams and the general Muslim public." The statement marked a break with the Kingdom's low-key approach regarding the large number of Saudi jihadists who have signed up for militant Islamist struggles in recent years. (NOTE: The October 1 Sermon is considered an official fatwa. The Mufti's precise characterization of his statement, however, was as "a word, which I wrote to my Muslim brothers as an advice." END NOTE.)

13. (U) Dr. Saleh Bin-Humaid, Imam of the Grand Mosque in Mecca and Chairman of the Majlis Al Shoura, echoed the Mufti's recent call to Saudi youth. According to "Arab News," he added that foreign groups were instigating Muslim youths, including Saudis, to fulfill their vested interests and create chaos. "They have exploited their (the youth) passion and made them time bombs and they (foreign groups) make political gains by using these youths as scapegoats," he said. Humaid's statement is significant because he made it at the Grand Mosque in Mecca on a Friday during Ramadan. The press described the Mosque as overflowing with worshippers as "thousands" stood in the streets leading to the mosques to join in prayer.

14. (U) Press commentary indicated that on October 3, Ahmed ibn Qassim al-Ghamdi, Director of the Commission for the

Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice office in Mecca, emphasized the importance of jihad in Islam. However, he added that the current calls for jihad are made by groups having vested interests and have resulted in Muslims killing each other. Dr. Khaled Bajahzer, a professor in Islamic studies, encouraged the young to make use of their time and energy in a constructive manner. He also hopes Saudis will follow the Mufti,s advice.

¶5. (U) The Arabic daily, "Al-Sharq Al-Awsat," stated that Al-Asheikh deserves credit for speaking the truth at a time when "the Arab public only heard what it wanted to hear, or what the inciters among the sheikhs had to say." Editorials indicate the true value of this fatwa lies in the fact that it proves traditional sheikhs do not issue fatwas that cause discord or divisions among the society. Another important value, according to an editorial from "Al-Sharq Al-Awsat," is that although not everyone agrees with what traditional sheikhs say, no one can call them instigators or accuse them of inciting discrimination. Finally, other comments refer to the statement as a courageous step to control the flow of terrorists into Iraq and Lebanon.

¶6. (U) Subsequent media reports indicate that on October 7, the Presidency for Scientific Research and Religious Edicts, the Riyadh-based organization consisting of prominent Islamic scholars who issue fatwas, set up a website for its religious rulings. According to press reports, the website is in response to calls for authenticating religious edicts in Saudi Arabia. The site provides quick access to fatwas issued by Dar al-Ifta, which is affiliated with the Council of Senior Islamic Scholars headed by Al-Asheikh. Also, the website,s goal is reportedly to give Muslims a place to review authentic and widely accepted fatwas issued by the

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Kingdom's "Islamic authority."

¶7. (C) COMMENT: The Grand Mufti,s fatwa and its reiteration by the Imam of the Grand Mosque is another positive step towards fighting the war against terrorism in the Kingdom. Since it is unlikely the Mufti issued the statement without the consulting the Royal Family, this fatwa is also an important statement for the SAG. The Grand Mufti and the Imam are key influencers and credible voices; their statements will reach other imams and the public as a whole. The support expressed by key members of the religious community for this statement -- including that of the politically and religiously influential Humaid at the Grand Mosque -- is clear evidence of the weight the Grand Mufti's words carry. END COMMENT.
FRAKER